

**Department of Labor**  
**Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses and the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries**

*Americans are living longer than ever before, and many are staying in the workforce past age 55; although older workers experience similar events leading to injury, they sustain more severe injuries than their younger counterparts and require more days away from work to recover.*

**Lead Agency:**

Bureau of Labor Statistics

Providing impartial, timely, and accurate data relevant to the social and economic conditions of our Nation, its workers, and their families.

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**General Description:**

Older workers face many of the same workplace hazards as do other workers; the most prevalent events leading to job-related injuries or fatalities are falls, assault, harmful exposures, or transportation incidents. But in many cases, the nature of the injury suffered by an older worker is more severe than that suffered by younger workers. Older workers who suffer a workplace injury may experience longer recovery periods than their younger counterparts. And older workers die from workplace injuries at a higher rate than do younger workers. This analysis focuses on occupational injuries, illnesses, and fatalities among older workers, and identifies differences in the severity of the events as a result of age.

Americans are living longer than ever before, and increasing numbers of older Americans are working. These facts have led to expanded interest in the activities of older Americans and their work life. Americans born at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can expect to live an average of 77 years, an increase of 9 years, compared with persons born a half century ago. Those aged 65 in 2000 can expect to live 18 years. Considering age 65 to be a typical retirement age, individuals can expect to live nearly 2 additional decades. Both the need to feel productive and the need for income may lead these older Americans to work during what are typically considered retirement years.

But the need to work does not come without potential hazards. This article explores recent data on workplace injuries, illnesses, and fatalities among older workers. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses and Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries provide a wide range of information about the events that led to an injury, illness, or fatality, the demographics of the workers involved, and the types of occupations and industries where these incidents occur.

***Excellence:*** What makes this project exceptional?

***Significance:*** How is this research relevant to older persons, populations and/or an aging society?

***Effectiveness:*** What is the impact and/or application of this research to older persons?

***Innovativeness:*** Why is this research exciting or newsworthy?

The percentage of older Americans in the labor force has been increasing. As it has, the need to understand the particular experience of older workers has expanded with it. Presenting the demographic data available from the Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses and the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, this article demonstrates that older workers need more time to recover from non-fatal work-related injuries and illnesses, experience more traumatic injuries like fractures and multiple injuries, and sustain a higher fatality rate than do younger workers. Two case studies are included that demonstrate that older workers are likely to have more severe injuries even when the event leading to the injury was not particularly serious.

These findings are important to policy makers, regulators, employers, and safety and health researchers. They are used in the development of safer workplaces for older workers, which is important as the American workforce ages.

This article is innovative in that it presents demographic data available from the Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses and the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, the premier source of information on the safety and health of American workers. Using these data, consistent comparisons between older and younger workers across many different case characteristics can be drawn. The data presented in this article highlight the experiences of older workers, experiences both anticipated and surprising.